

Origin of Dave Parker's 'Boys Boppin' shirt

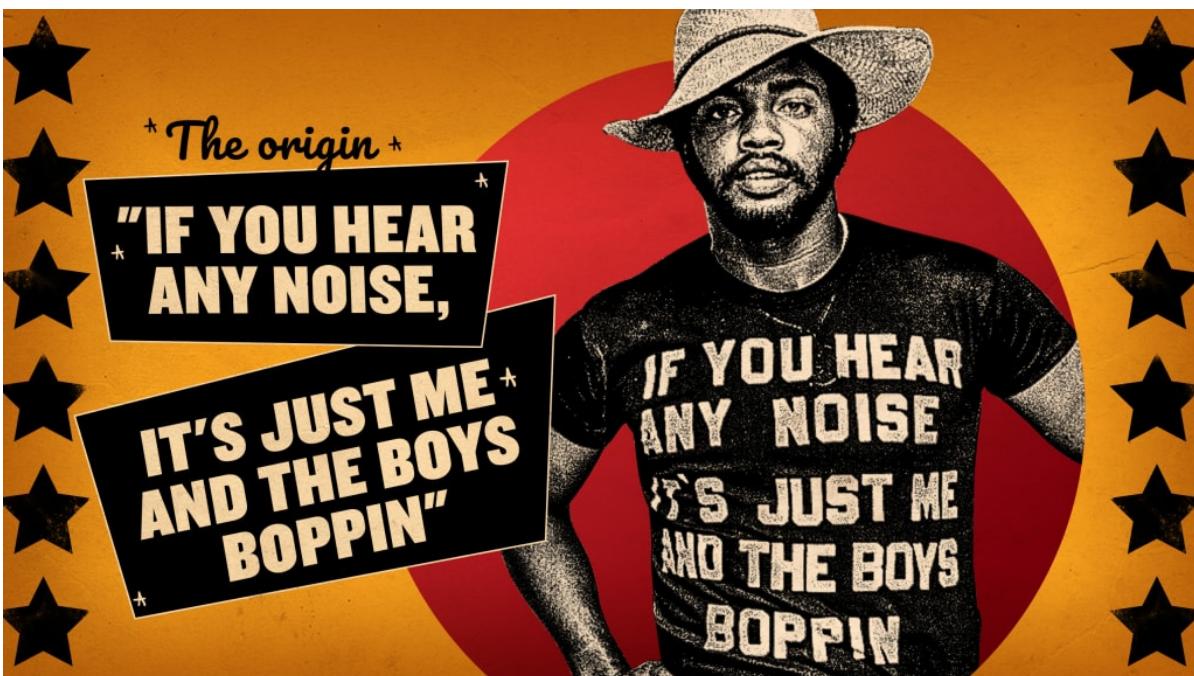
The greatest phrase in baseball history

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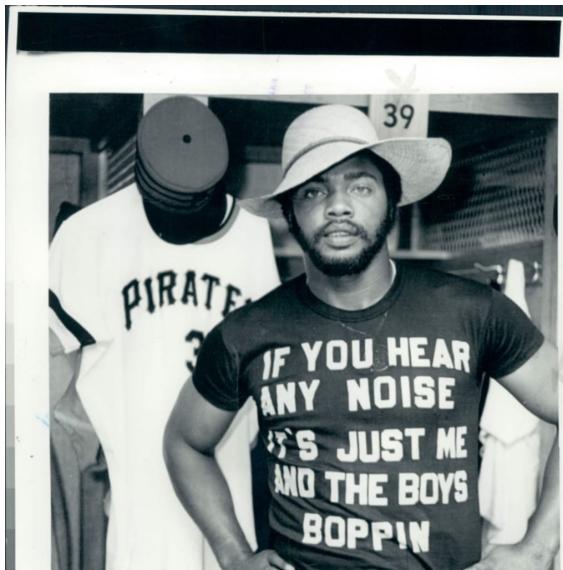
The Pirates needed runs, badly. Though it was just the start of the 1976 season, and the team had jumped out to win its first five games, the bats were growing cold just as quick: They had just been swept in a two-game series with the Phillies, scoring only one run along the way. In their last four, the Bucs scored more than three runs only once. The team's record slipped to 6-3, just a half-game up in the NL East.

This was a team loaded with offensive firepower, with Richie Zisk, Al Oliver and the colorful, endlessly quotable, don't-turn-away-or-you'll-miss-something-magical [Dave Parker](#) in the outfield. Willie Stargell was the team's quiet and universally beloved leader. So, to have trouble scoring runs was not an acceptable outcome. Usually, that meant Stargell would be the one to tell

a player that he needed to pick up his game with a quiet word or even a simple cock of his head as he walked by in the clubhouse.

"It was Willie's team," Parker told MLB.com. "I came and I took over Sergeant of arms, but Willie was the main guy."

Sure, it was early in the season and there was no reason to panic, but Parker realized that he could offer something that Stargell couldn't. So, with a poetic flourish just as memorable as anything Walt Whitman ever penned, Parker composed the most legendary baseball T-shirt of all-time: "If you hear any noise, it's just me and the boys boppin'." (Sorry, [Bert Blyleven](#).)



In 2019, [Parker curated a playlist for The Hardball Times](#) and included "Mothership Connection" by Parliament. Released on the album of the same name in December 1975, the song includes the lyric:

*If you hear any noise
It's just me and the boys
Hittin' that (groovin')
You gotta hit the band*

"There was many a night when we were out driving the streets of Pittsburgh after games heading to the clubs, George Clinton's distinctive voice broadcasting from the car stereo," Parker wrote. "Larry [Demery] drove this four-door Lincoln Continental with turquoise interior. My Parkinson's isn't strong enough to make me forget those late nights with Larry, blasting the P-Funk as we rolled up to the club."

In April 1976, Parker was standing at the bar of a club after a game and was inspired.

"I thought that if my teammates saw me strut into the clubhouse, cool and confident, wearing a badass message that there would be nothing to worry about," Parker wrote. "Because that's the mindset you need to succeed at this level. So that's where the T-shirt came from."

"That's typical Dave Parker garb that he would walk in to the clubhouse on any given afternoon," ace reliever and owner of the [greatest on-field shades](#) Kent Tekulve said. "This was a weekday at

home in Pittsburgh, and that's what he walked in with. It was a little bit of a spin off of '[The Lumber Company](#),' but just a more personal inside thing from guys who were swinging the bats. He just decided one day, I don't know where -- it must have been the mall -- to make a T-shirt."

It wasn't the mall, though, and Parker wasn't in the clubhouse ironing on his own letters, either.

"I had a T-shirt guy make it for me," Parker said. "It was over in Squirrel Hill. It was a record shop and a T-shirt shop."

Don't expect there to be too many of these shirts out there either, because Parker didn't make them up for the whole team. The one he wore -- and which has inspired countless knock-offs and reproductions -- is the only original in existence.

"He wasn't *my* fan," Parker joked about the store clerk, "so he would have wanted a little extra cash."



Jul 17, 1979

1:03

Parker throws out Rice

"Pretty much Dave doing what Dave does," Tekulve said about Parker's tee. "If they were slumping a little bit or weren't swinging the bats real well, he'd come in and say, 'Hey, guys, remember, we're really good. We're not gonna do this forever. We're really good.'"

This was Parker's thing. The slugger known as "Cobra" always had a way with words, from explaining that he was sure to win the batting title by saying, "When the leaves turn brown, I'll be wearing the batting crown," to his reasoning for wearing a Star of David necklace: "My name is David and I'm a star."

"He was as quick-witted as anybody I've ever seen," Tekulve said. "He had comebacks, he was on top of everything."

But it wasn't just Parker that made this clubhouse special -- the entire room had a respect and love for each other.

"The one thing that we could do in Pittsburgh is we could talk about each other," Oliver said. "We all could crack on each other. No one would get mad. And that's the thing that I always enjoyed about playing in Pittsburgh -- how everybody could crack on each other and it was accepted."

The phrase didn't even become a calling card of the team -- unlike three years later when Pittsburgh rallied around Sister Sledge's "We Are Family" (which is its own story for another day). The hitters never told each other to listen for the sounds of boys bopping.

"The reason why I say that it's something that we wouldn't say to each other," Oliver said, "is because each one of us knew we were going to do some bopping. And so it goes without saying. That was really, truly the attitude of our team, because of the confidence that we had as hitters and as players."



Unfortunately, the shirt and that confidence wasn't enough. The Pirates were still a strong team, but they finished 92-70 and in second place in the NL East.

Usually, that would be the end of the shirt. History -- even baseball history -- tends to belong to the victors. Not many people remember team slogans for clubs that didn't take home October's greatest prize.

But Parker's phrase -- and photo -- resonated. The picture has been passed down among baseball fans for decades as one of the most iconic and effortlessly cool shots ever taken. Fans buy reproductions (of which Parker likely saw nary a cent) and they are always instant conversation starters. Evan Longoria once printed up shirts for his Rays teammates and staged his own photo.

Parker's legendary T reached new relevance this spring when slugger Luke Voit of the Yankees -- a team loaded with home-run-smashing thumpers -- was spotted wearing a new version. This time, the "NY" part of "Any" received a little special attention.

Is Parker shocked that his clubhouse joke has inspired teams and fans nearly 50 years later? Absolutely not.

"If you've got something that's commercial, it can click in anytime," Parker said. "So, it doesn't surprise me that it caught on again."

And does he mind the Yankees rocking it? That answer is simple:

"As long as they can bop. It's kind of flattering, so I'm all for it."